Using Therapeutic Humor to Facilitate Diabetes Self-Care Behavior

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Program Goal

To inspire the use of therapeutic humor as a technique to promote diabetes self-care efforts.

Program Objectives

1. Share at least one descriptor that defines therapeutic humor.
2. Review the how, what and when of facilitating humor.
3. Identify how to incorporate at least two ways of using therapeutic humor in your clinical setting.
A Person Without a Sense of Humor

“Is like a wagon without springs. It’s jolted by every pebble on the road.”

- Henry Ward Beecher

What is funny about diabetes?

Overview

1. Background – “the basal”
   (history, definitions, theories, benefits, harmful vs. helpful)
2. Healthcare specifics - “the bolus”
   (who, how, what, when)
3. Diabetes humor examples – “correction”
   (AADE7 icons, cartoons and case studies of people with diabetes (PWD) generated humor)
Part 1: Humor Background

History, definitions & theory, oh my!

A Brief History: Norman Cousins

- Psychosomatic illness vs. wellness
- In 1979, published *Anatomy of an Illness*
- Started humor intervention therapy
- Focused on what could go right!
- Don’t deny the diagnosis, try to *defy* the verdict

The Power of Thought

- No such thing as false hope.
- Beliefs become biology.
- It always biotranslates.
- Sad attitudes may lead to artery blockage.

-Dr. Lee Berk (Loma Linda University)
Humor Definitions

1. Normal + Incongruity  
   (what we expect and a surprise on what really happens)

2. Makes you think differently

3. Is criticism, cloaked as entertainment

4. Sense of humor – a readiness to find something to laugh about  
   (being funny not required).

Humor-related Quotes

“Humor is the good-natured side of truth.”  
― Mark Twain

“We see what we seek. We choose what to focus on.”  
― Yakov Smirnoff

“A smile is the shortest distance between two people.”  
― Victor Borge

“Humor is about something normal that is violated in some way that we can tolerate.”  
― Bob Mankoff

Haidee Merritt, Cartoonist, T1D

“Humor keeps reality at a safe distance”
Psychological Role of Humor

- Is acknowledged to be a mature defense mechanism
- Helps adjust to an anxiety-producing stressor in an adaptive, productive way.
- Humor is a common theme around diabetes online community “DOC” participation

Humor Styles: Which is Yours?

**Affiliative:** tendency to share humor with others, make others laugh

**Self-Enhancing:** a humorous outlook on life even when alone, cheer oneself up

**Aggressive:** involves sarcasm, teasing, ridicule, derision, put downs

**Self-Defeating:** amuse others at one’s own expense, self-disparaging, or used to hide one’s true feelings from self and others

Humor Styles: Which is Yours?

- Socially warm vs. socially cold
- Reflective vs. boorish
- Competent vs. inept
- Earthy vs. repressed
- Benign vs. mean-spirited

Another Look at Humor Styles

(Ruch 2008)
Common Humor Topics

- Sex makes up majority of all jokes, ethnic humor is next, followed by family conflict
- More than half of humor is a play-on-words (a twist on familiar clichés, metaphors, book/movie/song title, puns, or any expression widely known by the public)

Pun Humor

- From the Italian word puntiglio meaning fine point.
- A humorous use of a word to suggest two or more of its meanings, or the meaning of another word similar in sound.
- Arby’s: From “R.B.” the initials of Roast Beef


Opportunity: Acronym Humor

CIGNA: Called In, Got No Answer
RACE: Run And Call Engineering
DNA: National Dyslexic Association
CPMC: Can’t Park My Car
(not California Pacific Medical Center!)

What about YOUR organization’s acronym?
Non-Enjoyment Smiles

From different emotions:
- masking negative emotions (when actually sadness or anger is felt)
- when miserable, flirting, sadistic, embarrassed, in contempt
- enjoying a frightening film
- phony smiles

(The Primer of Humor Research, 2008. Ruch, pg. 22)

About 20 Types of Smiles

Controlled by 5 facial muscles
- Zygomatic Major and Minor;
- Levator Anguli Oris;
- Buccinator; Risorius

(The Primer of Humor Research, 2008. Ruch)

How about a big, forced smile when you look at yourself first thing in AM?

Smiles Increase Pain Tolerance

Neither laughter nor humor are necessary for pain reduction effect to occur.
Enjoyment smiles and simple amusement improve pain tolerance.

(Martin, Rod. Primer of Humor Research, Humor and Health. 2008; 496)
Comedy Increases Pain Threshold

- Exposure to comedy increases pain tolerance (comparable to effects of relaxation)
- Opposite effect if watching a show not enjoyed
- Analgesic effects may occur with both positive and negative emotional arousal (comedy or horror films proved better than neutral films)

(Martin, Rod. Primer of Humor Research, Humor and Health. 2008.494)

Mona Lisa Smile – Not That Simple

A smile in one society may portray friendliness, in another embarrassment, while in still another it may be a warning of hostilities and attack if tension is not reduced.


Laughing vs. Smiling

- Laughter is a public event, while smiling a private event.
- Smiling is not contagious, but laughter is.
- Laughter is a social phenomenon, but “getting the giggles” rarely happens when alone; reason for laugh track

(BD?)

Laughter Theories

**SURPRISE** – catches you off guard = ha ha.

**SUPERIORITY** – socially acceptable outlet for aggression.

**INCONGRUITY** – connects 2 or 3 concepts that seem absurd.

**RELEASE/RELIEF** – relieves tension/anxiety (e.g. nervous laughter). Freud said laughter is a physical manifestation of repressed thoughts of …

Sigmund Freud

Laughter arises from “the release of previously existing static energy.”

*(Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious, 1905)*

Schadenfreude:

The pleasure taken in mishaps that befall others.

Freudenmadchen – a cheap joke.

7 Causes of Laughter

1. Humorous
2. Social: babies laugh before speaking (age 4 mo); children 400x/day; adults __?
3. Ignorance
4. Anxiety
5. Derision (ridicule, mockery)
6. Apologetic
7. Tickling

*(Giles and Oxford, 1970)*
When genuinely enjoying humor, note the facial configuration: pulling the lip corners back and upwards and raising the cheeks causing eye wrinkles

(From The Primer of Humor Research, 2008. Ruch, pg. 21)

Duchenne Display: Not Faking It!

The Duchenne’s study of the electrophysiology of expression, showing the facial muscles activated in mirthful (unintentional) laughter.


Measuring Humor Enjoyment

- Is associated with positive health outcomes whereas forced laughter may not be (Described by Bonanno and Keltner 1997; Zweyer, Velker and Ruch 2004).
- Leads to pain relief thru endorphins release
- Consider the types of laughter you promote

Genuine Enjoyment Laughter?
Laughter – Helpful?

- Life satisfaction and laughter have been associated with another
- Reduces arterial wall stiffness & improves endothelial function
- Lowers risk for MI, reduces recurrence after MI in diabetes
- Can cause arrhythmias, syncope, trigger asthma attack, make a hernia protrude


Gelatophobia – the fear of ...

Being laughed at, appearing ridiculous.
- Doesn't see smiling/laughter in a positive way.
- Caused by shameful experiences, bullying, intense traumatic events as youth/adult.
- Presents cold as ice, humorless, “Pinocchio-Syndrome”, trembling, blushing, sleep issues, social withdrawal/avoidance.
- Shares behaviors with other groups, except they are convinced they are strange to others and will be laughed at as a result.

Titze (2009)

3 min Text, Tweet, or FB challenge

Send one word, phrase, or example of what therapeutic humor means to you
- Come up to mic
- Tweet @TheresaGarnero or
- Text me 831-917-0749 or
**Therapeutic Humor**

“Any intervention that promotes health and wellness by stimulation of a playful discovery, expression, or appreciation of the absurdity or incongruity of life’s situations. This intervention may enhance health or be used as a complimentary treatment of illness to facilitate healing or coping, whether physical, emotional, cognitive, or spiritual.”

Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor

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**General Humor Benefits**

- Reduces stress, pain
- Improves immune function
- Fosters communication
- Allows for expression of anger
- Minimizes professional burnout
- Turns “ha, ha” into an “aha” moment
- Laugh-learn connection
- Social lubricant in groups

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**Other Benefits**

- The higher a person’s sense of humor score, the higher the odds ratio of surviving 7 years (Svebak et al, in Norway, 53,000 adults; HUNT-2 study. Int J Psychiatr 2010;40:125-146)
- Laughter reduces severity of depression
- Laughter helps manage bipolar disease
- Wt. loss strategy
- PCPs & surgeons who included humor or laughter during visits less likely to be sued for malpractice (Levison W, et al. Physician patient communication: the relationship with malpractice claims among PCPs and surgeons. JAMA, 1997;279:593-599)

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More Research Studies...

Laughter/Humor Interventions in Disease-Related Cohorts

✓ N is *typically* small (10 to 48)
 üDesigns varies btw random control trial, per/post test, nonrandomized
 üInterventions: comedy video &/or live + exercise, laughter yoga/therapy, clowns, comic audio
 üFindings: self-rated health (improved A1C, sleep and quality of life; less fatigue and depression

(Bennett PN et al., ‘Laughter and Humor Therapy in Dialysis. Seminars in Dialysis Vol 27, No5, 2014)

Diabetes-Related Humor Benefits

✓ 30 minutes of laughing lowers post-prandial glucose.¹

✓ 30 minutes of self-subscribed laughing per day *increases HDL by 26% and reduces C Reactive Protein by 66%.*²

¹Hayashi K. Laughter lowered the increase in postprandial blood glucose. Diabetes Care. 2003;26:1651-1652.
**Other Benefits**

- Laughter activates opioid release
- Laughter is an effective adjunct therapy in cardiac rehab
- Inverse association btw. sense of humor and coronary heart disease
- 1 year after 2 week study wherein people with a heart attack (MI) watched 30 mins. humor of choice: *only 2 recurrent MIs in laughter group and they needed less meds vs. 10 MIs in control group (who also had worse BP).*

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**Laughter Yoga in Residential Care**

- A 6-week feasibility study evaluated laughter yoga (LY); n = 28 residents
- Measured affect, happiness, BP, pulse
- Improved mood, happiness, lowered BP (besides providing opportunity to have fun, exercise and enjoy)


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**Laughter & Humor Therapy in Dialysis**

- Laughter can relieve suffering but it cannot cure disease.
- Therapeutic interventions in dialysis could range from humorous videos, stories, laughter clowns. Put on a culturally appropriate humorous video during painful needling.
- Laughter yoga – nurses/pts. can be trained as J therapists. Long-term therapeutic effects with dialysis pts. unclear.

Bennett PN et al., Laughter and Humor Therapy in Dialysis. Seminars in Dialysis Vol 27 No5, 2014)
## Contraindications

**During a crisis, such as high anxiety or serious discussion**  
(may be more distracting and aggravating than tension relieving)

**During complex tasks**  
(it is important not to stick humor in the middle of a task requiring full concentration)

## Humor-Health Warnings

- Humor is personal. What makes one laugh may annoy/insult someone else.
- People with a good sense of humor may live longer, but the sense of humor might not be the cause (may receive better care than do the grumps.)

## Possible Side Effects

- Can be hurtful and can be offending.
- Can distract from the message.
- Can promote anger, prevent communication, increase anxiety, widen interpersonal gaps.
- Avoid these by keeping humor lighthearted
- Avoid sensitive topics (*race, politics, religion, sexual orientation*)
- Use cautiously with asthma and COPD
Part 2: Healthcare Specifics

The how, what and when

Healthcare Professional

➢ Humor is underutilized
➢ Nurses are socialized to be serious
➢ It’s a skill that many haven’t developed

Developing YOUR Humor

1. Know the benefits.
2. Identify and avoid inappropriate humor.
3. What is comfortable for you? Be genuine.
4. Do a humor history.
5. Take risks to add more humor. It’s a process not an event.
6. Allow yourself to be silly.
7. Hang out with humorous, positive people.
8. Learn to laugh at yourself!!

Go Outside Your Comfort Zone

- Go beyond daily routine
- Ex: go to an improv v workshop, a toastmasters meeting, take a dance class, play a new sport, volunteer, sing at barbershop chorus
- Commit to one new activity a month
  WHY???
  It will stimulate your creativity.
  Try this …

Using Humor Professionally

1. Tailor your comments to fit your pts sense of humor, style and personality.
2. Let them lead w/smile, or laugh; then join in.
3. Make sure you have permission. Is your relationship open enough for you to tell each other when you’ve gone too far?
4. Use humor in context. Humor is tragedy + time. If too close to tragedy= cruel/senseless.
5. Humor can hurt or heal. When in doubt, don’t.
6. Be ready to apologize.

Use the AT&T Rule

A = appropriate
T = timely
T = tasteful

Best to make fun of your self.
Laugh with, not at.
Sometimes a simple smile can be healing.
Apply Dr. Peter McGraw’s Benign Violation Theory

Where the “funny” happens

Humorous
Not Humorous

Close tragedy
Distant tragedy
Close mishap
Distant mishap

BENIGN VIOLATION

BENIGN DISTANCE

(McGraw, Warren, Williams, and Leonard 2011)

Resident’s Perception

✓ Make sure the resident does not perceive that you are minimizing the seriousness of their problems!
Environment for Humor

1. Timing
2. Receptiveness
3. Content

During Assessment and 1:1

• During greeting, assess readiness.
• Are they receptive to humor?
• Are their eyes alert? Look away?
• Ask if humor is helpful.
• Listen to the tonal quality of laugh.
• Apologize if offense taken.
• A humorous manner may signal an unstated wish to talk about feelings.

Children

• Should look quite different
• Playfulness, body humor, music and facial expressions
• They play with words like they do toys
• Study of type 1 kids (ages 4-11) about the expectations for quality nursing care:
  * humane and reliable
  * have a good sense of humor
  * wear colorful clothes
  * tell funny stories

Adolescents
May interpret the humor as making fun of them. Use cautiously after a relationship is established. Use matter-of-fact use of humor.

Older Adults
- Aging is associated with loss, except one’s sense of humor.
- Humor often relates to issues of loss.
- Assisting home health pts. to maintain or regain their health or well-being and to deal with disabilities, dying, or other human conditions in culturally congruent and humorous ways may be beneficial.

Laughter, Laingering, and Home Healthcare
Schwartz, Kathleen D. BSN, RN; Saunders, Jana C. PhD, RN, CNS

Top 5 Jokes about Elderly
1. Age or longevity
2. Physical ability or appearance
3. Being old fashioned
4. Losing sexual ability or interest
5. Concealing one’s age

What Humor Tools Do You Use?

1. Next to none
2. Spontaneous humor
3. Planned humor
4. Posted cartoons, images, or props

Adding Humor to Your Facility

1. A smile, a hug, positive energy
2. Create a laughing basket
3. Share jokes (books for all occasions, seniors)
4. Play fun group games (like wedding photo guessing game or the neighbor’s cat game)
5. On Cue Staff Dancing
6. Themed Days – wear goofy hats or outfits
7. Songs for Seniors Quiz during a residents meeting
8. Sing Happy Music (e.g. You are My Sunshine)
9. Invite children to Play (watching kids play can bring joy and laughter)
10. Watch sitcoms from back in the day or funny YouTube clips
11. Laughing yoga
12. The humor challenge

Adding Humor to Home Care

1. A smile, a hug, positive energy
2. After rapport established, create outrageous scenarios as to why you were late followed by, “Not really”
3. Pull a rubber chicken or a ______ out of your nurse bag just once (you have to know your pt. well to do this!)
4. Find their favorite type of music, pull it up on YouTube and have a 1 minute dance party
5. Ask what types of things make them laugh? (Do a “silly analysis” and match your approach to what they like)
6. Post procedure humor. After giving an injection, “Did I ever tell you I’m great at darts?"
7. While wrapping that nice vascular wound, they could watch a funny pet video. You could add a bow to the drsg.
8. A mini-laughing yoga exercise
9. Share comics, real-life humorous signs
Use the Humor of Human Truths

- Babies can smile in the womb but learn to frown at 6 mo.
- People laugh least in the first half hour after waking up.
- 50% of women would rather have chocolate than sex.
- Americans throw away 27% of food each year.
- 86% of all married people admit to giving their spouse the finger when he or she is not looking.
- 75% of industrial accidents happen when breakfast skipped.
- 69% of people eat the cake first, then the frosting.

(Secrets of Connecting Leadership and Learning with Humor, by Peter M. Jonas)

Adding Humor to Your Workplace:

**Ground Rules - Keep it Clean**

1. **Humor board** in high traffic areas: post funny articles, cartoons, quotes, guess the photo (baby or pet photos), guess the most miles driven this month, DIY horoscopes

   ![Humor board image](image)

   Name this fruit.
   Or vegetable?
   (It’s bitter melon)

2. **Humor first aid kit** (with stress balls, bubbles, fun hats, goofy glasses, buttons, caution yellow tape)

3. **Schedule joy breaks**: go for a brief walk, listen to music, a one song dance party, a mini-laughing yoga exercise

4. **Start a joy gang** whose purpose is to plan and implement activities throughout the year.

5. **Make meetings, yes – ENJOYABLE.** Start with “Wins” – things that went right, have themes, have someone keep time so than 5 minutes before it is supposed to end, play the Jeopardy or another fun song, blow bubbles, bring props like mustaches, red noses, etc., decide to all wear the same color (except don’t tell the one person, like your boss, and see if he/she notices)
Cultural Issues

- Understand humor preferences within a culture.
- Tread lightly.
- Use it only if you belong to that culture and you have established a relationship with the person.

Part 3: Examples Inspired by PWD & Beyond

“Correction Factor”

What "cup" did you use for your third cup of rice?
Healthy Eating Humor from PWD

• If it tastes bad, you can have all you like!
• May the force be with you…eat fiber! – fiber!
• A portion size – isn’t that what they serve you?
• All they talk about is food. By the time you get out of here, all you want to do is eat!
  • Space out meals like feeding at the zoo.
  • I was diagnosed a few margaritas and desserts ago.
  • I do eat a variety – cake, cookies OR ice cream.
  • The other day I hailed a pizza driver.
• Of course it’s a diabetes cake – there’s only room for one candle.
• Class 1: how to make ourselves enjoy cardboard.
• I leave no room for air when I pack my 1/3 c rice
• I eat lots of sugar free stuff when I need a high colonic
• I clear my plate but it still goes to waist
  What you’re saying is I can eat out of a thimble

Other Self-Care Behavior Humor from PWD

• It’s not a treadmill, it’s a dread-mill.
• Can I have sex with my insulin pump?
  Yes, but wouldn’t you rather have sex with your wife?!
• My mother-in-law ruined my A1C.
• I exercise at night; I get up several times to the bathroom
• My meter says “hi” in 9 languages.
• I resent when they say, “It’s just a little prick.”
• A flat line is good in diabetes, unless its 40.
• According to my weight, I should be 7’ 3”
• I fell into a metabolic trap.
• I needed to improve my blood sugar, pressure and cholesterol, so I stopped going to the doctor.
• I resisted when they say, “It’s just a little prick.”
• I resent when they say, “It’s just a little prick.”
• A flat line is good in diabetes, unless its 40.
• I fell into a metabolic trap.
• I needed to improve my blood sugar, pressure and cholesterol, so I stopped going to the doctor.

More Self-Care Behavior Humor

• I love what you do for me, Metformin!
• ARBS are good but carbs are bad?
• Don’t be so insulin naïve.
• Why aren’t diabetes pills as cheap as Viagra?
• I feel sorry for all the pills drowning in my stomach.
• Why aren’t diabetes pills as cheap as Viagra?
• I feel sorry for all the pills drowning in my stomach.
• Insulin site rotation patterns, an X, an SOS, an SOL.
• I take my socks and shoes off every visit until my doctor diagnosed me with a foot fetish.
• I needed to figure out my blood sugar patterns, so I called the psychic hotline.
• Pt. “I’m having trouble with sex.” CDE: Have you told your doctor?
  Pt. “No. She’s not cute”
• How do I treat lows? A little glucose spray, cheese whiz and shredded beef jerky.
• How come you feel low every time I’m in the mood?
Humor Effectiveness

- No response
- Occasional/continuous smile vs. snarl
- Rare chuckle vs. intermittent laughter (polite chuckle vs. hearty laugh)
- Nearly continuous laughter with other spontaneous body movements
- Read the room

How are you going to use therapeutic humor to help PWD?

Resources

- The Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor
  www.AATH.org
- International Society for Humor Studies
  www.hnu.edu/ishs/
- HUMOR project
  www.humorproject.com
- John Kinde’s HumorPower Programs
  Sign up for a bimonthly free Ezine
  JohnKinde@aol.com
- The New Yorker Cartoon Bank
  www.cartoonbank.com
- diabetescatalysts.com > Resources.
  Lots of humor links

check www.laughteryoga.org